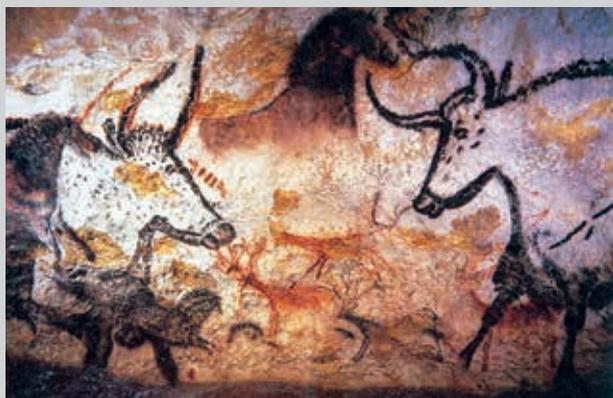


# CRAFTING A LIFE

## Christine Brooks Cote



Aurochs, horses, and deer painted on a wall of the Lascaux Cave in southwestern France, c. 22,000 BCE



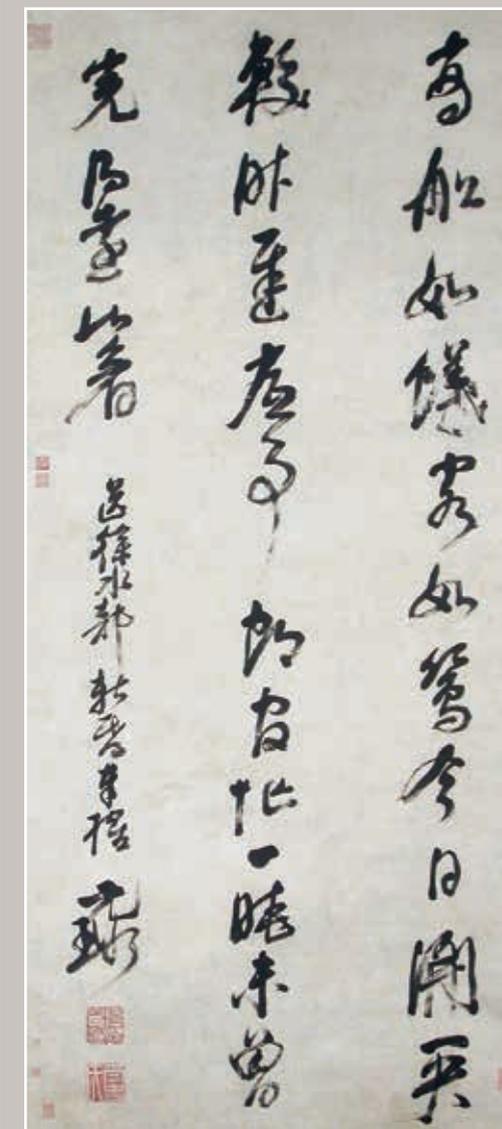
Painted pottery vessel from central Iran, c. 5,000 BCE

**M**AKING THINGS IS A fundamental part of being human. Consider cave paintings—the earliest of which date back roughly 65,000 years—and the abundance and diversity of items found at the sites of archaeological digs all over the world. Humans have long made things out of necessity—arrowheads, tools, shelters, clothing, stone structures such as hearths and ovens, pottery and containers—but even necessities were often made with adornments and flourishes that exceeded their specific purposes. From early on, the making of things was a means of personal expression, a way to communicate social identity and status, a conveyance of symbolism, and an element of ritual. Things were made to be useful and durable but also to experience the joy of creation from the first shimmer of inspiration to the pinnacle of realization.



*“No single definition of the word [craft] satisfies the range of activities—mental and manual—that craft comprises; nor is there another term in English to describe the way in which creative thought interacts with a knowledge of materials and techniques to create an object.”*

—David Revere McFadden



Ni Yuanlu (1593–1644), Calligraphy, hanging scroll

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Panel embroidered in crewel wools on blue linen, c. 1740

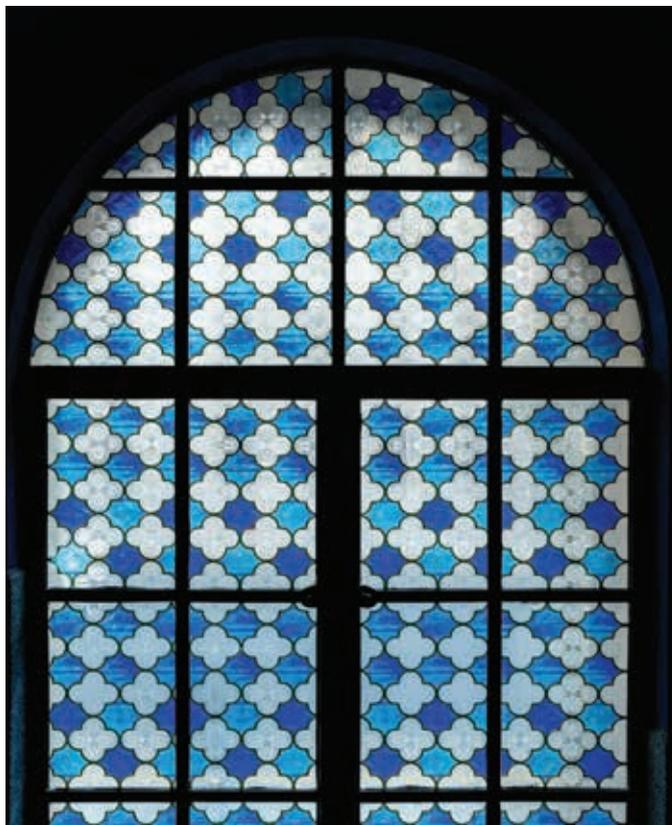


*“I have brought to my art a reverence for craft, primarily because I believe that the way an object is fashioned contributes to its meaning. One could say that my art is carefully ‘crafted’ to convey the meaning I intend.”*

*—Judy Chicago*



Sashiko jacket, late 19th century



*“Writers, performing artists, and chefs refer to their own special knowledge, talent, and ability as their craft. Painters and sculptors often consider their craft as fundamental to achieving their artistic goal. Craft is as readily discussed in the world of fashion as it is in interior design. In all these instances, craft seems to have something profoundly important to say about ‘how things are made,’ piquing our interest in both the tangible and the intangible aspects of creativity.”*

*—David Revere McFadden*



Lidded Basket, New York, 1860

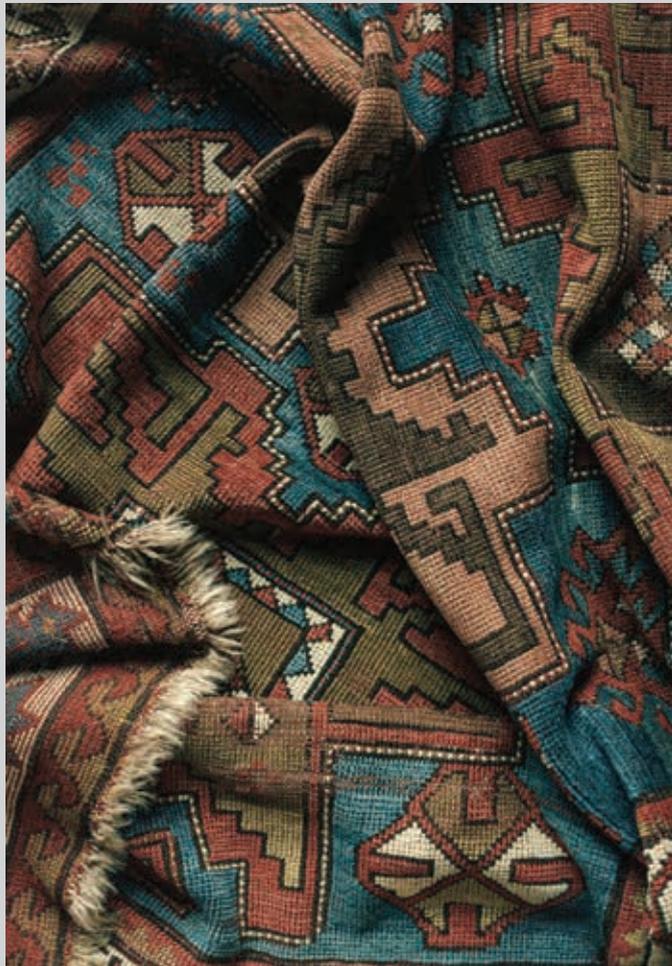


Bowl, Ming dynasty (1368–1644)



Quilt top, 1807

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James X. Smith, Shaker, Sewing Table, 1843

Many have tried to pinpoint the difference between *craft* and *art*, but the line separating the two is very blurry. To understand craft, it helps to look at the difference between *craft* and *industry*.

The Industrial Revolution presented a challenge to craft with its division of labor and mass-production machinery. But an appreciation for craft in society stayed strong. As David Pye discusses in *The Nature and Art of Workmanship*, the distinction between *craft* and *industry* is one of *risk* versus *certainty*.

*“The craftsmanship of risk is a process where the quality of the result is frequently at risk during the process of making and is dependent on the judgment and care exercised by the maker. The craftsmanship of certainty requires comprehensive planning of the process before manipulation of the materials with all variables predetermined and pretested to the greatest extent possible.”*

*—James Stevens*

Society sees that risk offers rewards that are desirable: unique objects rather than ones that are mass-produced and identical; objects that may bear slight imperfections, indications of character and charm; objects that have been held in the maker’s hands and made with care and pride; objects that are gifted or passed on through generations rather than tossed in the trash. Something made with risk is seen as having greater significance and value.

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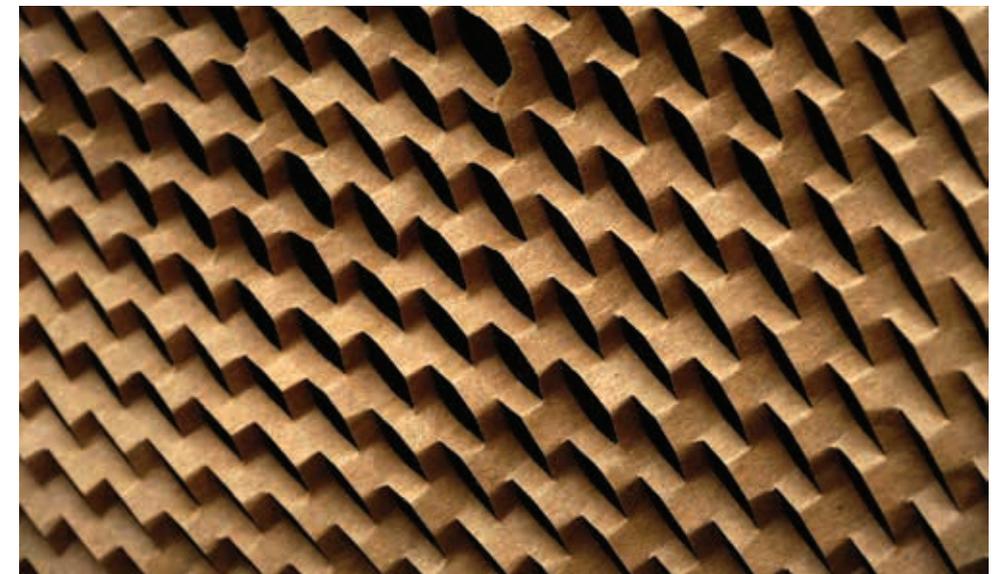


Here is where *craft* and *life* find their commonality. There is nothing certain about life. Every moment of every day involves risk—not knowing how to proceed, trying something to see if it will work, sometimes having to undo past efforts and try another way, hoping it all works out in the end—and possibly suffering the consequences of our actions. By accepting and living with the risks, we *craft* our lives.



Just as we improve and progress in our *craft* as we do it, we learn how to live a better life as we do it, and often the lessons learned are interchangeable: patience, perseverance, problem-solving, a sense of curiosity, the importance of mental and physical stimulation, and so many more.

Crafting a well-lived life is not without risk and uncertainty, but if we seek certainty, we miss the point. ✨



CHRISTINE BROOKS COTE founded Shanti Arts in 2011 to revel in nature, art, and spirit. She has called Maine her home for the last thirty years.